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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABUJA 000666

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/W AND DRL

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [EPET](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: RIVERS STATE VIOLENCE COULD IMPACT OIL

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter for Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

1.(C) In an April 4 conversation with Embassy CRO, Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) representative Chris Newsom (New Zealand national), warned of a dramatic increase in electoral violence in Rivers State due primarily to hotly contested gubernatorial and local races. According to Newsom, violence against opposition ANPP candidates had reached very serious levels. Only a few of the more dramatic examples of this have reached the international media (e.g. the March 29 attack on an ANPP rally in Baraka, a few kilometers outside of Port Harcourt). However, thugs frequently disrupted ANPP rallies, but these incidents go unreported, he claimed.

2.(C) Newsom predicted that the aftermath of the election will be a continuation of the violence that preceded it. Whoever wins, the loser will be angry and blame his loss on the victor's fraudulent influences over the election. Ethnicity will play a role in this because Governor Odili knows the Ogoni oppose his return. Newsom also echoed a familiar refrain heard among the opposition: the Governor, Deputy Governor and National Assembly members will fight tooth and nail to retain office so that they can ensure their immunity from prosecution.

3.(SBU) On April 9 CRO visited ANPP gubernatorial candidate Chief Sergeant Awuse in Mgbuetor, on the outskirts of Port Harcourt. Awuse was angry about reports received only an hour earlier of an attack on houses in Mgbuetor, including the houses of his relatives and his personal assistant. Awuse claimed this attack was carried out by PDP supporters. CRO later visited the affected neighborhood, taking photographs of the damaged buildings and vehicles (digital vehicles will be e-mailed to DRL and AF/W).

4.(C) According to several residents interviewed, approximately 20 young men from neighboring villages came in with guns, large sticks and knives and began breaking windows, doors, appliances and furniture in the houses. The attackers reportedly told the residents they would be back that night to inflict more damage. CRO saw several residents packing personal belongings into vehicles, saying they were afraid to remain in the village. Some residents claimed the attackers were looking for Awuse personal assistant. Visibly enraged by the attack on his and his parents' home, the assistant stated that he could "not let this attack go without a response." "His boys" would counter-attack, he vowed.

5.(C) Newsom claimed that established civil society groups in Port Harcourt are pessimistic about peaceful elections in Rivers. He said Rivers indigenes were watching the Warri crisis closely. People were predicting that the electoral violence and underlying tensions could erupt into an outburst similar to Warri -- where a group might try to shut-down oil production in an attempt to advance their cause.

Comment

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6.(C) Newsom is a relative newcomer to Nigeria and is wedded to MOSOP, the best known and most influential, but not the only community organization among the Ogoni. There is no love lost between MOSOP and Governor Odili and, by extension, between MOSOP and most of the PDP in the state. Thus, what Newsom says must be taken with a grain of salt. His general characterization of political violence in Rivers State is accurate but the instigation of it is not as one-sided as Newsom described.

7.(C) Talk among local thugs about shutting down oil production maybe be braggadocio or an attempt to extort local authorities and the oil companies; however, such talk cannot

be dismissed summarily. As both we and the GON have fear,  
the situation in Warrai could be repeated elsewhere in the  
volatile Niger Delta.  
JETER